Egyptian Mummies

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM / UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Egyptian Mummies

Mummification as practised by the ancient Egyptians was an attempt to preserve personal identity after death. The beliefs which produced this unique art centred in the worship of Osiris, king of the dead, symbol of immortality, and the most popular among the numerous Egyptian deities.

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM / UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

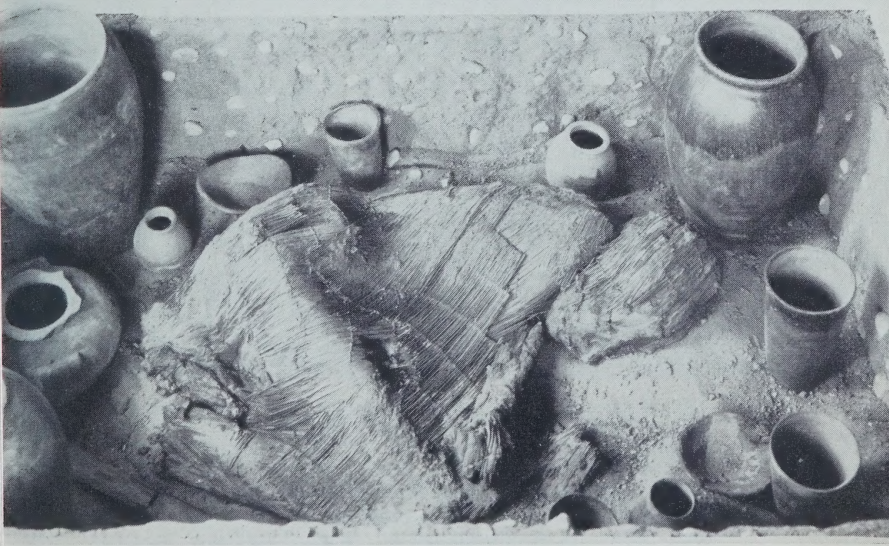
Osiris (centre), Anubis (left) and Thoth (right), three bronze statuettes used as household gods or as temple offerings. About 6th to 3rd century B.C. Heights 7⅞ in., 4⅛ in., 4⅛ in.

The dead came to be mystically identified with Osiris, and he was pictured as a living mummy. Two other gods were prominent in the beliefs and ritual connected with funerals: Anubis, the jackal-headed guardian of the tomb, and Thoth, the ibis-headed scribe of the gods.

The earliest Egyptians were simply buried with knees bent, in pit graves in the desert, where the hot dry sand was a natural preservative. As the gradual development of the tomb and the elaboration of wrappings isolated it from the sand the body decayed more rapidly. Thus belief in the importance of physical survival was suggested by natural processes, and mummification arose as an artificial substitute.

At least as early as 2700 B.C. persons of highest rank were buried extended, in close linen wrappings, and resin-soaked linen was moulded over the features. At that time embalmers used natron (a native soda) as a drying agent, removed the viscera by means of an incision, and probably also coated the body with resin.

Prehistoric burial, before 3000 B.C. The man was buried facing west, in the position of natural sleep, and wrapped in matting. Burials of this period contained food offerings, beads and simple household objects. Length of grave 46 in.

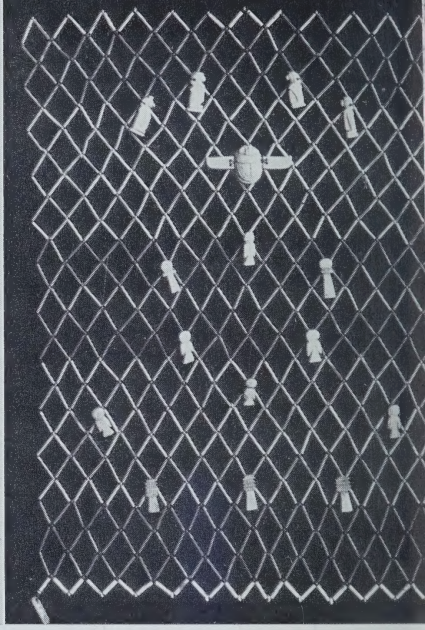


Left: Mummy of a man with wrappings intact except for damage at the skull. Probably about 1000 B.C. Height about 5 ft.

Right: Mummy of An-tjau, son of Ankh-Hor and the lady Tjes-Net-peret, with the wrappings removed from the head. About 7th or 6th century B.C. Height 5 ft. 1 in.

Until 1000 B.C. mummification, still virtually confined to the wealthy, became increasingly elaborate, but its essential features remained the same: desiccating the body by covering it with natron; removing and separately preserving the viscera; cleansing, and in later periods stuffing, the body cavities; anointing the skin and treating it with resins to preserve its form; wrapping the body in layers of bandages and shrouds. From the 18th Dynasty (1570–1340 B.C.) the brain was often removed through the nostrils. During the 21st Dynasty (1085–950 B.C.) packing materials, such as mud and linen, were introduced beneath the skin; artificial eyes were used; and the viscera were returned to the body cavity after being embalmed. After this period mummification declined, gradually dying out during the

Limestone canopic jars, 7th to 4th century B.C. They are examples of the standard set of four receptacles to contain the viscera. During the later periods, the lids represented the four protective sons of Horus: Imseti (human-headed), Duamutef (jackal-headed), Hapy (baboon-headed), and Qebhsnewef (falcon-headed). Height about 12 in.



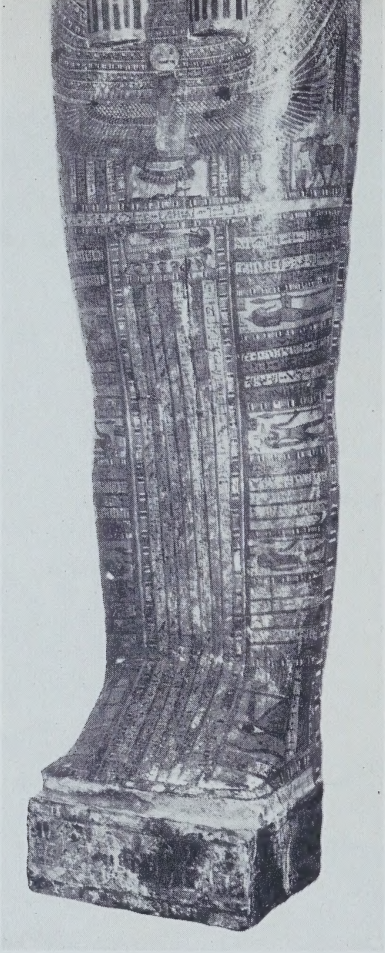
Cartonnage mask of the Ptolemaic period (332–30 B.C.), with gilded face and painted decoration. On the lappets of the headdress are Isis and Nephthys, each with a mummy before her. Height 18 in.

Bead net with amulets, about 7th to 4th century B.C. The beads and amulets are of faience (glazed siliceous ware). The beads are arranged in bands of blue, green, red and yellow. Among the amulets are four baboons (the animal of Thoth) and two *ankhs* (symbol of life). Length 19 in.

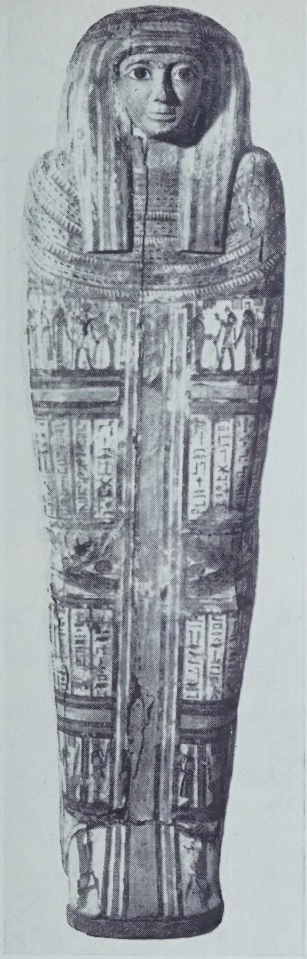
Roman period (30 B.C.–A.D. 324). Masks of painted cartonnage (combined plaster and linen, later also waste papyrus) were common about 2000 B.C.; later the whole mummy was enveloped in cartonnage, but in Ptolemaic times (332–30 B.C.) masks again became common, with separate units of cartonnage sewn on other parts of the body. During the late periods a bead net was often spread under the cartonnage. At this time large numbers of amulets were laid on various parts of

Selection of stone and faience amulets, 7th to 4th century B.C.
Top row: *djad*, symbol of Osiris; *pesesh-kaf*, used in the revivifying ceremony at the funeral; mason's square.
Middle row: double plumes; eye of Horus; frog; girdle-tie.
Bottom row: headrest; heart; scarab beetle; papyrus sceptre.
Height of largest 1⅝ in.

the mummy, or placed in the wrappings, for its protection. Amulets represented parts of the body, objects of daily use, sacred symbols and hieroglyphs.



Lower part of lid, *left*, and lid interior, *right*, of coffin shown on page 4. Near the top of the exterior section is a winged figure of the goddess Nut, and to the right, a ram, symbol of the creator god Khnum; below, the mummy lies on its couch. On the interior Nut is shown without wings. Spaces above and below contain offering formulae. Length 75 in.



Left: Coffin of about 7th or 6th century B.C., of Pedikhons, son of Haty and Di-sy-Ast. Various deities stand before the two mummiform gods Osiris (left) and Sokar (right). Other gods and demons appear between and below the columns of text. Length 79 in.

Right: Coffin of the 4th century B.C., of Ta-sheryet-Ahet, daughter of the high priest of Hermopolis Djed-Thot-ef-ankh and the lady Seta-irt-bint. Instead of painted decoration this coffin has an incised inscription on the plain wood. It was shaped out of a single log, originally completed with pieces dowelled to it. Length 69½ in.

The hieroglyphic inscriptions on coffins and cartonnage are prayers and spells. They are often combined with pictures illustrating the funerary cult; at an earlier period they also showed scenes from daily life.

Left: Cartonnage case of mummy, about 7th or 6th century B.C. It belonged to Djed-Maat-es-ankh, chantress of Amen-Re. Horus is seen leading the deceased before the enthroned Osiris, who is attended by Isis and Nephthys; below are the fetish of the sacred city Abydos with divine standards, the boat of the funerary god Sokar, and the four sons of Horus. Length 65 in.

Facing page, top: Detail of painted decoration from a coffin of the 12th to 10th century B.C. The cow goddess Hathor, protector of the cemetery, stands before the tomb. Above, a winged serpent goddess and the "spirit" of the deceased, a human-headed bird. Width 10 in.

Facing page, bottom: Scene from the judgment after death, a detail from the painted cartonnage case on this page. Anubis and Horus weigh the heart against a feather, symbol of truth; at the left, Thoth stands behind the deceased. Height of Thoth figure about 5½ in.

Three *shawabti* figures, New Kingdom (1570–1085 B.C.). Left: of the lady Iwy, painted limestone, about 16th–13th century B.C. Centre: of Nefertari-mer-en-Mut, a queen of Rameses II (1298–1232 B.C.), wood covered with black varnish. Right: of a man Pa-en-Asar (?), violet-blue faience, about 12th–11th century B.C. Heights 7½ in., 6⅜ in., 6½ in.

Facing page: Wooden *shawabti* box of the lady Ta-di-Re, daughter of Hor, priest of Month, and mother of the "lord of the house" Seren. About 18th century B.C. Length 11½ in.

For the owner's comfort the tomb was provided with food and drink, personal effects, both real and in replica, models of servants, and wall pictures illustrating daily life. From about 1700 B.C. there developed, as a standard part of the funerary equipment, the *shawabti*, a model worker to substitute for the deceased in the forced labour of the next world. *Shawabtis* later appeared in sets contained in special boxes.

SUGGESTED READING

G. Elliot Smith and W. R. Dawson, *Egyptian Mummies* (London, 1924)

W. R. Dawson, "Making a Mummy," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* (Vol. 13, 1927), pp. 40 ff.

A. Lucas, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries* (4th edition, revised and enlarged by J. R. Harris, London, 1962), Chapter 12, "Mummification"

D. E. Derry, "Mummification," in R. Engelbach (ed.), *Introduction to Egyptian Archaeology* (Cairo, 1946), pp. 167 ff.

I. E. S. Edwards, *A Handbook to the Egyptian Mummies and Coffins Exhibited in the British Museum* (London, 1938)

R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, Vol. III, "Salts, Preservation Processes, Mummification" (Leiden, 1955)

R. A. Martin, *Mummies* (Chicago Natural History Museum, 1945)

A. T. Sandison, "The Study of Mummified and Dried Human Tissues," in Don Brothwell and E. Higgs (eds.), *Science in Archaeology* (New York, 1963), pp. 413 ff.

Calvin Wells, *Bones, Bodies and Disease* (London, 1963)

H. E. Winlock, *Materials used at the Embalming of King Tut-ankh-Amun* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Papers, No. 10, New York, 1941)

© The Governors of the University of Toronto, 1964

Printed at the University of Toronto Press